

A Conversation About Practice

In the early twenty-first century, few words crop up in so many contexts—from art to science to theory to politics to everyday life—as “practice.” Scientists, lawyers, athletes, musicians, artists, and yogis all practice, while rarely pausing to reflect on what this practicing means. In politics, practice (a.k.a. “praxis”) is in crisis, caught between forms of mass struggle, neoliberal market-driven individualism and social movements anchored in the collective practice of daily life. The ubiquitous talk of practice in contemporary art reflects the shift from the artwork or medium toward open-ended actions, series, processes and projects. It also suggests a kind of professionalization (the practice of law or medicine) and an emphasis on forms of repetition, discipline, rehearsal or training (zen practice, basketball practice). What do we mean today when we talk about artistic practice? Is everything a practice—and what are we (diverse humans and nonhumans around the planet) practicing for?

This launch celebrates the publication of *Practice*, edited by Marcus Boon and Gabriel Levine, in the MIT Press/Whitechapel Gallery series Documents of Contemporary Art. The editors will be joined by four interdisciplinary artists and thinkers—Diane Borsato, Sameer Farooq, Lee Su-Feh, and Rea McNamara—for a conversation about what it means to practice.

Participant Bios

Marcus Boon is a writer and Professor of English at York University in Toronto. He is the author of *The Road of Excess: A History of Writers on Drugs* (Harvard, 2002), *In Praise of Copying* (Harvard, 2010) and co-author with Timothy Morton and Eric Cazdyn of *Nothing: Three Inquiries in Buddhism* (U. Chicago, 2015). He co-edited a collection of writings on *Practice* in the Visual Arts with Gabriel Levine (MIT/Whitechapel Documents of Contemporary Arts series, 2018) and recently finished work on a book about the powers and practices of sound and vibration in contemporary culture called *The Politics of Vibration*. He writes about music for *The Wire* and collaborates in making immersive vibratory environments with Christie Pearson as *Thewaves*. www.marcusboon.com

Diane Borsato has established an international reputation for her social and interventionist practices, performance, video, photography, and sculpture. In her projects she has worked closely with various other practitioners including artists, dancers, and amateur naturalists. She has exhibited and performed at major Canadian institutions including the Art Gallery of Ontario, The Power Plant, the Art Gallery of York University, MOCCA (Toronto), the Vancouver Art Gallery, the National Art Centre (Ottawa), and in galleries and museums in the US, France, Mexico, Taiwan and Japan. She is currently Associate Professor in Studio Arts at the University in Guelph where she has taught advanced courses that explore the relationships between art and everyday life, including Food and Art, Special Topics on Walking, OUTDOOR SCHOOL and Live Art. www.dianeboorsato.net

Sameer Farooq is a Canadian artist of Pakistani and Ugandan Indian descent. He completed an MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design (2014), a BFA from the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam (2005), and a BA from McGill University (2000). His practice creates community-based models of participation in order to re-imagine a material record of the present, enlisting the tools of installation, documentary filmmaking, photography, writing and the methods of anthropology. The results are collaborative works which counterbalance how dominant institutions speak about our lives: a counter-archive, additions to a museum collection, or a buried history made visible.

Recent projects include an ambitious public installation at the Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, a residency with Open Studio, Toronto, and an upcoming exhibition inaugurating the University of Nevada Reno's new arts centre. He has exhibited internationally and nationally at the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Contemporary Art Gallery (Vancouver), the Art Gallery of York University, Maquis Projects (Izmir), Blackwood Gallery (Mississauga), Trankat (Tétouan, Morocco), Sol Koffler Gallery (Providence), Artellewa (Cairo), and Sanat Limani (Istanbul).

Lee Su-Feh was born and raised in Malaysia. While studying both traditional and contemporary theatre and dance there, she was indelibly marked by teachers who strove to find a contemporary Asian expression out of the remnants of colonialism and dislocated traditions. Important teachers were Janet Pillai, Marion D'Cruz and Krishen Jit. In 1985, she left Malaysia for Paris, where she was deeply influenced by the late Lari Leong.

Since arriving in Vancouver in 1988, she has created a body of work that interrogates the contemporary body as a site of intersecting and displaced histories and habits. As Artistic Director of battery opera performance, ("fearlessly iconoclastic"), she has worked both alone and in collaboration with other artists, notably David McIntosh, Benoît Lachambre, Justine Chambers to name a few. Her current project, *Dance Machine*, premiered at the Festival Trans-Amériques in Montreal June 2017 and is currently touring across Canada. She is Resident Artist at Toronto's Dancemakers Creation Centre for the next three seasons.

Gabriel Levine is a writer, theatre artist and musician, currently Assistant Professor and Coordinator of the Drama Studies Program at Glendon College, York University. His creative and scholarly work is concerned with experiments with tradition: the reclaiming of abandoned or suppressed vernacular arts and collective forms of life. His musical projects have resulted in numerous recordings on Constellation Records and other labels, and his theatre projects have toured to festivals in North America, Europe and the Middle East. In 2016, he curated *Animate Entities: Objects in Performance*, a two-day festival and symposium at the University of Toronto.

Levine's writing has been published in *PUBLIC*, *TOPIA* and the *Journal of Curatorial Studies*. With Marcus Boon, he co-edited *Practice* (Documents of Contemporary Art series, MIT/Whitechapel 2018). His recent catalogue essay for *Marlon Griffith: Symbols of Endurance* received an honourable mention in curatorial writing from the Ontario Association of Art

Galleries. He holds a PhD in Social and Political Thought from York University. www.gabriellevine.net

Rea McNamara is a Toronto-based artist, writer, curator, and public programmer. She has developed an expanded practice that includes space development, image making, performance and critical engagement with networked publics. Her works have been presented at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Art Gallery of Ontario, Société Des Arts Technologique, Nuit Blanche Toronto, and Moogfest.

From 2014 to 2015, McNamara was the Cultural Programmer at The Drake Hotel, curating exhibitions, events, performances, and residencies. Since 2015, she has been part of the internet-based collective Undervolt & Co., and has organized projects including *Sheroes: Virtual Season* for Whippersnapper Gallery, *BiWay Art Foundation* for the Wrong Digital Art Biennale, *MG Remixed: Allatonceness* for the Music Gallery, and *Community Arts Space: Art is Change* for the Gardiner Museum.

McNamara currently oversees public programming at the Gardiner Museum, and serves on the Board of Directors for the Music Gallery and Pleasure Dome. In addition to her art and curatorial practice, McNamara maintains an active writing presence. Previously an editor for *BLOUIN ARTINFO* and *Art F City*, her reporting and criticism on art, culture, and the internet has appeared in *The Globe and Mail*, *VICE*, *THE FADER*, *Canadian Art*, *NOW Magazine*, and more.